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ABSTRACT

Twenty New Zealand lecturers supervising third (final) year student teachers were interviewed and completed questionnaires about their supervision visits. Results focus on the professional development needs of the supervising lecturers and the associate teachers, and the ways in which student teachers could have been better prepared for their final teaching practice. Key factors in enhancing successful teaching practice and teaching practice supervision were the establishment of rapport between lecturer and student, rapport between the associate teacher and the lecturer, rapport between associate teacher and student teacher, and adequate time for the supervisory process. Relationships between associate teachers/student teachers and between associate teachers/supervising lecturers were also seen as factors inhibiting successful teaching practice. Professional development needs of lecturers focused on mentoring, induction courses, discussion groups, and feedback. Professional development needs of associate teachers focused on knowledge about School of Education expectations, competencies to expect of student teachers, feedback techniques, supervisory techniques, and student teacher autonomy. Student teachers expressed a need for additional preparation in articulating performance objectives and in doing unit planning. (JDD)

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Improving the Practicum: The Professional Development Needs of Lecturers, Associate Teachers and Student Teachers[1]

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Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a study of New Zealand lecturers supervising the final teaching practice for third year student teachers. Previous studies of teaching practice in New Zealand had focussed at a macro level and mainly reported general perceptions. This study dealt the experiences of twenty lecturers, each with a single student teacher. Initially, a questionnaire was used to survey each of the lecturers about their initial visit. Follow-up interviews were carried out with each lecturer after the third and final visit to the students had been made. The results presented and discussed in this paper focus on the professional development needs of supervising lecturers and the associate teachers, and the ways in which student teachers could have been better prepared for their final teaching practice. Suggestions for further research into how the quality of the teaching practicum might be improved are also included.

Introduction

Earlier studies of the teaching practicum on the Hamilton campus guided this research. Ramsay and Battersby (1988), surveyed the practicum of the then Hamilton Teachers' College (now the School of Education, University of Waikato) as part of a nationwide study. One of the major findings from this study (which applied to all the colleges, not only Hamilton) was that the stated aim of integrating theory and practice was generally not achieved. Students, and even the associate teachers, had difficulty in relating what was taught in their college courses to everyday practice in the classroom. Other findings specifically directed at the Hamilton Teachers' College were the need to provide quality experiences, the need for a more genuine team approach and a need for more individualisation of the programme (Ramsay and Battersby, 1988).

Another in-depth, longitudinal study of a cohort of students (Calder, 1989) reported that a 'halo effect' influenced students who had had less than satisfactory teaching

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practice experiences to either keep quiet about them or pretend they had had very successful experiences. There was also considerable dissatisfaction expressed about the method of evaluating their performance by teachers' college staff.

Since 1988 these issues have been addressed to varying degrees. However, students in a 1992 study (Oliver, 1992) reported that they felt there was still a summative emphasis in their assessment by both the associate teacher and the supervising lecturer. Oliver also discovered that there was a tendency for student teachers to comply with the practices of their associate teachers. Students reported that they saw a successful practicum as being dependent upon conforming to their associates methods, routines and general practices. From the students' perspective there was still no perception of the associate teacher, student teacher and supervising lecturer working as a team towards the same or similar goals. Real communication gaps were evident in the interpretation of the objectives for the practicum and the respective roles of each of the participants.

Rather than the 'macro' approach taken in the Ramsay and Battersby (1988) study which focussed on issues, such as what lecturers perceived to be the aims of the programme, and its strengths and weaknesses, the study described in this paper dealt with the lecturers' experiences with a single student. These experiences comprised of three official visits to the school, during one specific period of teaching practice, and with one associate teacher. This study was linked to Oliver's (1992) study, in that the same student teachers were involved.

Research Methodology

Twenty lecturers were selected at random from those visiting the forty two third (final) year student teachers on teaching practice who were themselves subjects of another concurrent research project (Oliver, 1992). The sample selected provided a representative cross-section of the supervising lecturers in general. There were equal numbers of male and female staff members, some with much experience in teaching practice supervision and others for whom this was their first experience. The sample included lecturers from each of the three departments responsible for preparing students for the teaching practice aspect of the programme (see Table 1).

Total No. lecturers				20
Gender	male		10	
	female		10	
Department	Curriculum and Subject Studies			16
	comprising	Art	1	
		Mathematics	3	
		Phys Ed	2	
		Social Studies	3	
		Reading/ Language	2	
		English	1	
		Science	2	
		Music	1	
		Ed Media	1	
	Maori and Bilingual Studies			1
	Professional Studies			3
Experience				
	over 15 years			1
	5-15 years			6
	1-5 years			9
	0 years			4

Table 1 Composition of the sample of supervising lecturers

The research questions emerged from the survey of previous investigations noted in the introduction, from the researchers' own experiences and from informal staff opinion. They were, from the supervising lecturers' perspective,

1. What factors appear to enhance successful teaching practice and teaching practice supervision?

2. What factors appear to inhibit successful teaching practice and teaching practice supervision?

3. What are the professional development needs of lecturers as supervisors of teaching practice?

4. What are the professional development needs of associate teachers?

5. In what ways did students develop professionally during the teaching practicum?

6. In what ways can student teachers be better prepared for their final teaching practice experience?

In order to answer these questions, two research strategies were employed. Questionnaires were used to gather information about the lecturers' first supervision visits and to elicit information about the background experiences of the supervising lecturers. Interviews of each lecturer by a research assistant took place after the final visit of the supervising lecturers to each of the student teachers.

The data gathered from the questionnaire was coded and quantified by one member of the research team. Initial issues and propositions which were mainly based upon the research team's prior experiences were investigated through responses to the questionnaire, interview items and probe questions in order to seek validation or otherwise. After reading through the transcripts of the interviews, the main categories of responses and information were recorded. The research team then scrutinised the material for similarities, differences and interrelationships between the categories which were eventually summarised/condensed into thematic issues. The findings from each of these themes are presented as results in answer to the research questions.

Results

The results are set out under each of the study questions listed above.

1. What factors appear to enhance successful teaching practice and teaching practice supervision?

Five main categories of response were identified in answer to this question. First, was the importance of the establishment of rapport between lecturer and student. This included the effort made by the lecturer to listen carefully to the student, the willingness of the student to act upon suggestions made by both the lecturer and the associate teacher, and, significantly, the effort made by both the lecturer and the student to get to know each other before the first visit .

The second key factor was the effectiveness of the associate teacher and lecturer relationship. This included the ability of both to communicate effectively, the willingness of the associate teacher to listen to and act on the suggestions made by the lecturer and the willingness of the associate teacher to make time to discuss the professional development needs of the student with the lecturer.

Thirdly, the establishment of positive associate teacher and student teacher relationships was seen as essential. This included the ability of the associate to provide an effective model, to give guidance and support but allow some professional freedom, the ability of the associate and student to work cooperatively and the willingness of the student to be involved in extra commitments. Finally, ensuring adequate time had been made available for the supervisory process and the extent to which the teaching practice guidelines had been used also contributed to the success of the teaching practice and the supervision process.

2. What factors appear to inhibit successful teaching practice and teaching practice supervision?

From the perspective of the supervising lecturers interviewed, two main factors appeared to inhibit successful teaching practice. Firstly, the associate teacher - student teacher relationship seemed to affect the student teacher's success. Several situations were identified that could cause a deterioration in this relationship. For example, if the student felt he/she was unfairly critiqued by his/her associate, where the associate appeared to have unrealistically high expectations of the student teacher, when the student had more than one associate teacher to relate to during the practicum and /or where there was a lack of opportunities for the student teacher to take the initiative, the relationship between the student teacher and the associate deteriorated to the detriment of the student teacher's performance.

The second factor that was identified as inhibiting successful teaching practice was when there were difficulties in the relationship between the associate teacher and the supervising lecturer. One lecturer felt that she was intruding in the classroom and that this situation was not conducive to her giving quality feedback to the student.

3. What are the professional development needs of lecturers as supervisors of teaching practice?

Most lecturers considered it extremely important that there be professional development for the supervising lecturers. The area which was discussed most often in relation to professional development was the idea of mentoring or partnerships. Over half of the sample saw this approach as valuable and some suggested it should be mandatory for people to have a 'buddy' to work alongside in this process. One lecturer mentioned that a 'colleague in support' had demonstrated how to set out the manifold book and shared how much time to allow, how to go about visiting, what the subject expectations were, what is expected in 'full control' and what were suitable expectations of first, second and third year students.

Other suggestions included the provision of induction courses, small study/discussion groups to provide this sort of information, the use of video to demonstrate giving high quality feedback and specific workshop sessions that staff could opt into for guidance in this process.

4. What are the professional development needs of associate teachers?

While the supervising lecturers, generally, considered that associate teachers had provided valuable support and guidance for the student teachers, they identified six main areas of need for professional development of associate teachers. Firstly, the need for more knowledge about the School of Education expectations was seen as an important area for associate development. Comments were made such as:

> *' the associate teacher seemed a little hazy about them* (the teaching practice requirements); *I don't know whether she'd read them...'*

Similarly, some associates seemed unsure about what competencies to expect of first, second and third year students. The lecturers made comments about the need to provide the associate teachers with opportunities to increase their knowledge about the School of Education's expectations for specific teaching practices and for the competencies of each year group of students.

Thirdly, lecturers emphasised the need for many of the associates to learn more about giving high quality oral and written feedback to the student teachers. Questionnaire data revealed that approximately twenty two percent of the associates did not provide any written feedback to students by the first lecturer visit. Lecturers identified a need for the School of Education to provide professional development opportunities for associate teachers in giving high quality feedback to the student teachers. They backed this up with comments like:

> *'the associate's report did not reflect the concerns she had about her student.'*

and

> *'well, the one thing that I see very rarely is associate teachers sitting down and writing regular critiques on what the student is doing. ..'*

Related to this was the observation by lecturers that some associates needed to develop competencies which would enable them to take a more significant role in the supervision process. By this it was meant that with more professional development, associates could be asked to assume an increased role in the supervision process. As well as providing quality feedback on their teaching, associates could assume more responsibility for such areas as helping students improve planning and assessment

strategies, meeting their practicum requirements and making recommendations about their professional development needs.

There was a perception that some of the associate teachers needed to gain more understanding about how much autonomy to allow student teachers at different stages of their training. Finally, the need was expressed for teachers to provide a model of teaching which is more or less consistent with student learning at the School of Education.

5. In what ways did students develop professionally during the teaching practicum?

The supervising lecturers interviewed, described the development of competencies in the areas of planning, evaluation, management, professionalism, community relationships, reflectivity, insights about children, classroom organisation, motivation and a willingness to learn.

One lecturer pointed out that the guidance that was required for outstanding students should be quite different. One suggestion was to forgo observing a lesson and spend time talking with the student teacher about their plans for the future. This lecturer stated:

> *'...giving her a chance to reflect on where she goes from here...this student is an outstanding trainee...she is an astute person...and I didn't want to mess around with little bits about technique and little bits about the odd loose end here and there.'*

6. In what ways can student teachers be better prepared for their final teaching practice experience?

Lecturers identified a number of areas in which they felt students had not received sufficient professional guidance or support prior to the third year teaching practice. Significant among these was the need for development in planning. Specifically, they mentioned the need for student teachers to be able to articulate performance objectives based on the needs of individual children or groups, and for more practice in unit planning. Comments from lecturers that indicated planning as a major area for attention included:

> *'Unit planning was something people felt they didn't necessarily know enough about.'*
>
> *'...a lot of time was spent* (with the student teacher) *trying to distinguish...between a unit plan and individual lesson plans; and how evaluations of individual lessons contribute to further planning.'*

Other areas for further development reported by several of the supervising lecturers were in relationships with children, classroom management and management of the total learning environment. Some also noted the needs the student teacher they visited as general teaching and personal skills such as questioning, time management, communication and goal setting.

Discussion

It is important to recognise that the practicum as operating for primary teacher trainees at the School of Education in 1992 was responsive to previous research, principally, Ramsay and Battersby (1988) and Calder (1989); and the supervisory activities described by the subjects in this research contain many of the elements of what can be called 'good practice'. For example, student teachers were visited three times, allowing development to be noted and assisted. If the student teacher did not know the supervising lecturer, steps were taken in almost all cases for the two to meet prior to the visits taking place. While several lecturers did say they felt uncomfortable in their dual role of assessing and mentoring, the assessing role has been considerably minimised. Students were not graded, performance being simply deemed satisfactory or not satisfactory, and there was a helping programme in place for students whose performance was considered unsatisfactory. Thus, lecturers were not put in the position of having to fail students. The assessment was criterion-referenced. Student teachers (and associate teachers) were given copies of the criteria by which their performance would be judged prior to the commencement of the practicum and these criteria were usually the focus for discussion during the visits. The student teacher was provided with written feedback following each visit and these notes also contributed to the post-lesson discussion. In spite of this good practice, several issues were raised by the subjects of this research which if addressed, would make the teaching practicum more effective.

One such issue is that of who should do the teaching practice supervision. Central to this question is the issue of lecturer credibility. For example, should staff whose own experience has been in secondary schools visit students teaching in new entrant or junior classrooms? Should lecturers with expertise in one curriculum area observe and comment upon students teaching in a curriculum area other than their own? Are lecturing staff who have been out of the school classroom for a number of years really competent to comment on teaching in today's classrooms? A majority of lecturers in this study gave a qualified 'yes' to these questions. They believed that there are many aspects of teaching that have little to do with curriculum content in a narrow sense. Indeed, the criteria listed in the practicum handbook (1992) focussed almost entirely on these global aspects of teaching skills (such as, planning and preparation, general

teaching abilities, communication with children, classroom management and keeping of records). The contrary view, expressed by a minority of the lecturers, that lecturers' own experience should match the level and curriculum area in which the student is teaching, is an ideal. A moment's reflection convinces that it is impossible logistically if the other ideal, that a student be visited three times by the same lecturer during a practicum is to be maintained. The argument, also expressed by some lecturers that a small team of specialists fails for the same reason. The solution obviously lies in staff development. Time and expertise must be available for careful briefing, sharing of expectations with respect to planning, curriculum content and methodologies, and the degree of responsibility expected of the student.

The issue of conformity which loomed large in Oliver's study of those students who were being supervised by the lecturers in this study (Oliver, 1992), did not appear to be a big issue for the supervising lecturers. Nevertheless, among the factors which were seen to enhance the quality of the teaching practicum, was having an associate teacher who was willing to let a student take risks and try things out. Conversely, inhibiting factors included mention of associates who were unwilling to adapt their programme or classroom organisation to suit a student's style or beliefs about learning. The data suggested that the associates in the latter group were a minority and that most associate teachers were willing to let students try things out, provided that the planning and preparation were adequate.

As it was in this study, the quality of the associate teacher has been an issue in all previous research on the practicum at the School of Education. There have been earlier calls for more and better training of associates (eg. Ramsay and Battersby, 1988). While funding was made available in 1992 to enable a beginning to such staff development, there are not sufficient resources available to pay for teacher relief days for every associate teacher in the region. Alternative ways to deliver this type of training need to be explored. One suggestion is to involve the teaching practice liaison team as facilitators for their areas. They would set up groups and venues and arrange for developers to work with each group of lecturers.

At the same time as the study reported here was occurring, the teaching practice liaison coordinator surveyed associate teachers about their views of the supervising lecturers. The results of this informal survey suggested that associate teachers, in general, found the lecturers to be friendly, professional and willing to spend time with both the student and the associate as required. In particular, they indicated that they appreciated supervising lecturers who gave positive reinforcement and put emphasis on building student confidence, gave honest and helpful opinions even if it meant telling the student

he/she needed to work harder, were able to identify difficulties and offer practical ideas, allowed plenty of time for the visit so that good professional relationships could be established between all parties, and were thorough in the way they carried out their job and perused the student's planning, recording and teaching. From this information, associates and the supervising lecturers appear to agree that communication and relationships are keys to effective teaching practice experiences for student teachers.

There has been considerable effort in recent years to improve communication between the School of Education and associate teachers. A handbook of suggestions for associates has been developed and, as a result of the study reported here (Calder, Faire and Schon, 1993) an Advanced Studies for Teachers paper was prepared and offered to teachers in 1994. Unfortunately, so few teachers enrolled in this course that it was not taught. The conclusion to be drawn from this could be that although supervising lecturers are aware of the need for associate teacher professional development, the teachers themselves are not. Serious consideration needs to be given to how this problem could be addressed in the future.

One of the findings of this research was the unacceptably high number of associates who did not provide students with any written feedback of an ongoing nature (one fifth of the sample). The answer to this problem clearly rests with the supervising lecturer who should persuade the associate of the importance of this type of feedback, and point out that it is a requirement which they are obliged to meet as part of an associate teachers' job. In order to highlight the fact that the role of an associate teacher is a skilled and dynamic one, it may be appropriate to consider some kind of award for excellence in being an associate teacher in much the same way as many universities give awards for good teaching.

Finally, McGee, Oliver and Cartensen (1994) have recently published further findings about the perceptions of the students whom the lecturers in the study reported in this paper were visiting. This report also emphasises that the need to develop a good relationship with their associate teacher as paramount to a successful teaching practice. A second major issue was that of student teacher workload. The students reported this as very demanding, considering most had part-time work and extra school activities in addition to their teaching responsibilities. In regard to their supervising lecturers, most appeared satisfied, reporting that time spent with the lecturers was valuable in terms of offering assistance in planning and evaluating lessons, and particularly with regard to carrying out and completing tasks required by the University. A minority had concerns about the quality of feedback, inconsistent expectations and not knowing the visiting lecturer.

A feature of the results of McGee et al. (1994) was the very high expectations the students had for themselves on their final teaching practice. This high level of expectation set many up for feelings of failure and damaged their confidence. McGee et al. recommend that supervising lecturers (and associate teachers) can help student teachers establish realistic expectations during teaching practice, with a view to achieving a manageable workload that allows student teachers to practice without undue stress and overwork. Furthermore, they recommend that guidance about being realistic about socialisation factors that operate in schools. While there should be some scope for experimentation and innovation and trying different approaches, lecturers need to remind students that there are necessary limits. The issue of conformity versus freedom needs to be addressed in a realistic manner.

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